



NRC NEWS

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**OPENING REMARKS
BY
RICHARD A. MESERVE, CHAIRMAN
U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
AT THE
NRC ANNUAL DIVERSITY DAY OBSERVANCE
10:00 A.M. THURSDAY, JULY 11, 2002
NRC AUDITORIUM**

Good morning and welcome to NRC's annual Diversity Day observance. I am delighted to be able to join you this morning. With me today are my colleagues Greta Dicus, Nils Diaz, and Edward McGaffigan. As you know, Jeffrey Merrifield is awaiting Senate confirmation of his reappointment to the Commission and therefore is unable to join us this morning.

A number of organizations and individuals have given their time and talents to make this day possible and I would like to acknowledge them. The Commission is pleased to extend a warm welcome to Richard Valeriani, our guest speaker. I will be saying more about him in a

moment. I also extend a welcome to Holly Morris, Channel 5 Fox News, who will moderate the Diversity Game planned for later this morning; to vocalist Anjali Nardi; to the Colours Singers and Dancers of Northwestern High School of Prince Georges County; to the various musicians, arts and crafts vendors, and food vendors who will be here either on the Green or in the Exhibit Area throughout the day; and to the many professional organizations maintaining exhibits on the outdoor walkways. In addition, we appreciate the presence here today of representatives of the Maryland Governor's Office on Asian Pacific American Relations, the Montgomery County Police Department, the Montgomery County Public Library, and the Embassy of Kenya. I also want to recognize the NRC Office of Small Business and Civil Rights, and in particular the members of the Diversity Day Planning Group, for their hard work in arranging today's observance.

Diversity Day is the occasion on which we have the opportunity to celebrate not only our own ethnic and cultural background, but also those of our neighbors, friends and colleagues. It provides a chance to acknowledge the unique American social tapestry that our joint presence has woven over time. This is a day in which we should make special efforts to recognize that every human being is entitled to respect and dignity. The rising tide of ethnic conflict throughout the world shows the terrible consequences when there is a failure to bridge the gulf that can exist between people of different cultures and backgrounds.

Last year at this event I took the opportunity to reinforce the importance of not only supporting democratic principles and universal justice in theory, but also in putting these ideals into practice on a daily basis. I discussed the fascinating example of a largely forgotten figure in American history -- a revolutionary-period Virginian by the name of Robert Carter III. The ringing words of the Declaration of Independence assert -- "[w]e hold these truths to be self evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" Carter, who was one of the richest and most powerful men in Virginia, sought to bring these words to life. Unlike his more famous Virginia contemporaries, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, Carter took the unprecedented and unpopular step of freeing his more than 500 slaves. He devoted his lifetime to this effort, including even the purchasing of slaves so that he reassemble families in order to free family groups together. He was a maverick who saw long before his more famous Virginia contemporaries that universal principles of freedom and equality had to be brought home and applied in the hard cases of everyday life. It was a lesson that I urged all of us to learn.

Today, I would like to turn to a related subject and one that reflects a central paradox in the American experience. That paradox is revealed in the theme for this event -- "United in Diversity: We Stand." On the one hand, the state of being "united" involves the submergence of differences in recognition of higher or stronger connections. On the other hand, in "diversity" we celebrate differences; we recognize and appreciate the unique characteristics of culture, religion and race that separate us. At some level, the concepts must be seen as contradictory: one involves unification and the other involves separation. Yet somehow by merging the concepts, the American people are stronger than would otherwise be the case.

It has been said that a lawyer is someone who can hold two contradictory ideas in his head at the same time and wholly believe both. In a way, in our celebration of both unity and diversity, we all are asked to do the same thing. My thesis this morning is that the true genius of

the American experiment is the recognition that these ideas can be reconciled and that strength comes from that reconciliation.

Our forefathers recognized that there were some realms which are the business of government and there are other realms that must be reserved to the individual and that are private. The first ten Amendments to the Constitution, in particular the First Amendment's protections of speech, religion, and assembly, provide a legal foundation for the protection of this second realm. And we have learned over the years of our Republic that we benefit by honoring each other's culture. Each culture is a source of strength to its members and should be respected for that reason alone. But, even more, by crediting the experience of others we are broadened and strengthened ourselves.

This awareness was not always the case in America. I can draw an example from my own family. My wife's father was the child of Hungarian immigrants, who came to the U.S. in the early 1900s. Quickly upon arriving in this country, they changed their name, stopped speaking Hungarian, and sought to shed every vestige of their culture. They wanted to be seen as Americans, not immigrants. My father-in-law so much wanted to be seen as an ordinary American that it was only on his death that my wife discovered that he had been born in Hungary and had come to this country as a 2-year-old. The result of his aggressive effort to assimilate completely is that all connections with Hungarian culture -- the stories, the language, the names, the cooking, the celebrations, the linkages with the past -- have been completely lost. My wife feels somewhat impoverished as a result.

So this is a day in which we should acknowledge the strength that comes from our diversity. The events of September 11th have served in my mind largely to reinforce the importance of this celebration. It is appropriate to cast the battle in which we are now engaged as a stand against the evil acts of terrorists. But the battle can also be framed in a somewhat broader context. Osama bin Laden draws support on the basis that only one culture can be tolerated -- a vision that is drawn from a rigid and unyielding construction of social relations. His demand for unyielding and fanatical conformity stands in stark contrast with the freedom that comes from recognizing and respecting individual differences. This is truly the battle that Osama and his henchmen can never win.

Today, we come to this annual Diversity Day observance as the inheritors of two firmly established traditions -- diversity and national unity. In fact, our diversity is both broader and deeper than at any other time in our history. And as a consequence of the terrorist acts of September 11, our sense of national unity is also broader and deeper than in any period in recent history. The result of the interplay of unity and diversity in this country is that, as the world is becoming more Americanized, America is taking on the character and appearance of an international community.

I submit to you that in these developments, there is much to celebrate today.

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Now I take great pleasure in being able to introduce our special guest. Richard Valeriani is a veteran reporter with NBC News and the Associated Press. In the course of his reporting career, he traveled over 500,000 miles to more than 90 countries with Secretary of State Henry Kissinger; covered the White House for NBC during the Nixon/Watergate years; reported on the historic civil rights movement in the U.S., including the Birmingham riots and the Selma march; and covered riots, rebellions and other major news stories throughout Central and South America, including the Bay of Pigs invasion. Many of you probably grew up with Richard Valeriani reporting on the NBC Nightly News and the Today Show.

Since leaving NBC in 1988, Mr. Valeriani has worked as a freelance journalist and a training and development practitioner specializing in training corporate executives, professionals, and others on how to conduct themselves in television and print interviews. I could certainly use his advice. He has also appeared in the motion picture “Crimson Tide.”

Please welcome Richard Valeriani.